

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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## News Release

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### National Wildlife Refuge System Celebrates 105th Birthday!

While some tend to bemoan becoming yet another year older, Geoff Haskett, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, has found reason to celebrate the Refuge System's 105th birthday this month.

"As the Refuge System turns 105 this month, there is much to celebrate -- 548 national wildlife refuges and 37 Wetland Management Districts, together spanning about 97 million acres; more than 200 Refuge Friends groups that constitute a thriving citizens' movement; a new Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus with more than 130 members; and a sense across the country that national wildlife refuges matter in people's lives," said Haskett.

And although the Refuge System can always use more funding to meet the goals of its mission, this year's federal budget did include an increase in funding.

"We had some great financial news this year! The President signed an omnibus spending bill that increased the Refuge System funding by about \$39 million to \$434.1 million. Much credit goes to a reinvigorated Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), our Refuge Friends, the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus and our friends in the Senate as well, who together make the case for the Refuge System in ways that no one else can," said Haskett.

The removal of the bald eagle from the endangered species list was a tremendous achievement for the Refuge System. More than a hundred field stations are home to America's national symbol, and scores of wildlife refuges were established specifically for the raptor.



The de-listing of American Bald Eagles is just one of the accomplishments celebrated by wildlife enthusiasts as the National Wildlife Refuge System celebrates 105 years. This photograph was just one among many incredible photos submitted recently to the Wings Over Water Photo Contest. Keep your eyes peeled for OBX WILD- Take a Walk on the Wild Side coming soon!

Photo Credit: GUY LIVESAY | [www.livesayphotography.com](http://www.livesayphotography.com)

Locally, bald eagles are now a frequent sight on the refuges in North Carolina and at Mackey Island in Virginia.

"More important is what the bald eagle symbolizes -- national wildlife refuges in every part of the United States are models for conservation," said Haskett. "Whether it's our work for ducks and geese, whooping cranes or the Florida Key deer, national wildlife refuges are critical places for wildlife being squeezed by a world that runs on high octane."

Outreach programs designed to educate families to the world of the

wildlife also have grown over the decades.

"'Children and Nature' is a great theme for the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Refuge System can be proud that we've been connecting people with nature for decades," said Haskett. "I am thrilled not only at the number of programs that each year introduces and connects families to the natural world, but also at their innovation. Last year, more than 750,000 students and teachers took part in our environmental education programs. Each year, we welcome about 39 million visitors, who in 2006 poured \$1.7 billion of economic activity into neighboring communities."

In northeastern North Carolina, the Refuge System offers a long list of programs to allow the public access and an increased awareness of the importance of promoting and preserving the vast array of wildlife found in the region. Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival in November, Pea Island bird walks offered year-round, Wolf Howlings in the summer, Wildfest in the fall and other nature outings draw thousands of people each year to the local refuges.

"As we celebrate this anniversary, we know that we face many challenges, from climate change and urbanization, to a changing America that is too often more attuned to sitting in front of a video screen than awaiting the sight of 10,000 broad-wing hawks from one of our observation towers," said Haskett. "But when the bicentennial of the Refuge System comes around in 2103, generations not yet born will marvel at the land legacy we are creating today. I thank refuge staff for working so hard to continue and expand what the first century of refuge pioneers left to us a guarantee that at least a part of this great continent will forever be home to wildlife, great and small."